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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000738

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05-02-13

TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS CE NO JA KWMM

SUBJECT: In possible sign of a thaw, Tigers meet with Norwegian facilitators carrying messages from GSL

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 05/02/03 fax

- (B) Colombo-SA/INS 04/30/03 class e-mail
- (C) FBIS Reston Va DTG 301441Z Apr 03
- (D) Colombo 728, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Norwegian facilitators met with the Tigers on April 30. The Norwegians were carrying letters from the GSL in response to the Tigers' recent withdrawal from the peace talks and a key assistance committee. In other news, the peace track gets even busier next week as top LTTE, Norwegian, and Japanese officials visit Sri Lanka. The fact that the April 30 meeting took place is an indication that peace process tensions may be receding a bit. END SUMMARY

2. (SBU) MEETING IN THE WANNI: In the first meeting of its kind in some time, Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar and MFA envoy Jon Westborg met with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Political Chief S.P. Thamilchelvam on April 30. (Note: Westborg was Norway's ambassador to Sri Lanka before Brattskar recently took up the post.) The meeting took place in the LTTE-controlled Wanni region in northern Sri Lanka.

3. (C) Tomas Stangeland, polchief at the Norwegian embassy, told us that the meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere. He added that it was also "constructive." He confirmed that the main purpose of the meeting was for the Norwegians to provide the LTTE two letters from the GSL (see Para 4-5 for more details re the letters). Stangeland, who attended the meeting, added that the Norwegian side had also discussed several problems relating to the implementation of the February 2002 ceasefire agreement. (Note: In addition to the meeting in the Wanni, we have heard reports that Norwegian special envoy Erik Solheim was planning to meet LTTE chief spokesman Anton Balasingham in London soon.)

4. (U) GSL LETTERS TO THE LTTE: The first letter provided by the Norwegian facilitators contained a response by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe to the LTTE's April 21 pullout from the peace talks. (Note: The text of the PM's letter was sent to SA/INS in Ref B.) The PM's letter was conciliatory in tone, making several specific points in response to Balasingham's earlier letter pulling out of the negotiations. The PM's main points were: that there had been substantial progress in reducing tensions throughout the country with the ceasefire holding for over a year; the LTTE's inability to attend the Washington conference was due to U.S. law and was not the fault of the GSL; and that there was no intention to exclude the LTTE from future negotiations concerning humanitarian and economic topics. The PM wound up his letter by urging Balasingham to "review your present stance" and return to the peace negotiations as soon as possible.

5. (U) The second letter provided by the Norwegians to the LTTE was from GSL Peace Secretariat chief Bernard Goonetilleke and focused on the LTTE's pullout from an important humanitarian committee last week. (Note: Goonetilleke has been selected to be Sri Lanka's next foreign secretary.) Goonetilleke's letter, the text of which is contained in ref A, took a bit of a firmer tack than the PM's in that it warned the group that further postponement of peace negotiations could lead to a delay in the disbursement of assistance-related funds. Goonetilleke added that Subcommittee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) -- the joint committee the LTTE had recently pulled out of -- had actually done a lot of good work. The GSL urged the LTTE to make use of the committee if the group truly wanted to provide assistance to displaced persons, and create better economic conditions in the north and east.

16. (SBU) UPCOMING VISITS: In other peace-related news, the peace track heats up in the next week. The Norwegian embassy has confirmed that Balasingham will arrive in country on May 5 and immediately transit to the Wannu. It is not clear how long Balasingham will stay on this visit. In the meantime, Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Helgesen and Japanese Special Envoy Akashi are also due to arrive in Sri Lanka for visits focused on the peace process next week.

17. (C) COMMENT: The fact that the April 30 meeting took place is an indication that recent peace process tensions may be receding a bit. In past weeks, the Tigers had issued a number of hard-line messages while refusing to meet and discuss what was on their minds. In light of that, the fact that the group is back meeting with the Norwegians is constructive, perhaps heralding new thinking on the group's part re their decisions to pull out of the peace talks and the June donors conference in Tokyo. It is clear, however, that getting the process back on track involves a delicate tango, and, per the Tigers' mood, there could easily be setbacks. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS